

An Arms Control Treaty Built On American Illusions

By Richard Perle

HAVING COME to office with virtually no experience in foreign affairs, President-elect Carter drew around him a small circle of senior officials whose faith in the efficacy of arms control is exceeded only by their abhorrence of military power and their dread of confrontation with the Soviet Union.

So the acquiescence last week in a Cuban status quo declared only days ago to be unacceptable is wholly in keeping with the animating spirit of an administration which describes the U.S.-Soviet relationship as one of "cooperation and competition" but cannot tell the difference between them.

The fact is that since 1972, but especially since the Carter administration took office, the United States has been faced with unceasing Soviet global adventure accompanied, despite the "limitations" of the SALT I agreement, by a massive buildup of Russian theater and strategic air, ground and naval forces.

In Angola, Afghanistan, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Iran, Vietnam and Yemen, among the Russian-trained terrorists of the PLO or the expeditionary forces mounted from Cuba, the Soviet Union, our partner in detente, has been fomenting turmoil, inciting bloodshed and fueling wars.

In response, the Carter administration (which was helped to power by the impression that it would understand Soviet foreign policy better than President Ford was thought to understand the Polish political system) has chosen to take arms control against this sea of troubles:

- The Soviets and their Cuban proxies have intervened militarily and politically throughout the troubled Third World, exploiting ethnic and racial tensions and the fragility of new nations and weak governments. The administration responded by initiating negotiations with Moscow, proposing that we limit the sale of arms to our respective friends and allies — an unverifiable and unenforceable proposal which would threaten the supply of essential arms to our friends at precisely the moment that our friends are being threatened.

- The Soviets are engaged in a broad effort to encircle the oil fields of the Persian Gulf, fomenting trouble in Iran, intervening in Ethiopia, inciting war in Yemen.

The Carter administration response: proposals to freeze and then reduce the U.S. and Soviet military presence in the Indian Ocean. If accepted, the U.S. proposal would leave the Soviets, whose air forces are within easy range of the Indian Ocean and the Gulf, in a commanding position.

- In recent years, the Soviets have deployed no fewer than four new theater nuclear missiles, two new calibers of nuclear artillery and several new nuclear-capable aircraft. Partially to redress the resulting theater imbalance in Europe, the United States developed a family of "neutron" weapons whose destructive effects can be better confined to the battlefield, thus sparing nearby civilians. When the Soviets mounted a menacing political and propaganda campaign against our deploying these less indiscriminate weapons, the Carter administration response was to defer their production while asking that the Soviets show reciprocal restraint. Now, after two more years of Soviet military expansion, and without any sign of restraint, the neutron weapon deployment remains deferred, probably permanently.

- While the Soviets continue to conduct a massive nuclear testing program, several times more extensive than ours and some of it almost certainly in violation of the current threshold testing treaty, the Carter administration has pushed hard for a comprehensive, unverifiable ban on even very low yield nuclear tests; and it has done this while sharply reducing the U.S. testing program.

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So cardinal is it to the administration's outlook that it multiplies many times these examples of its faith, unsupported by reason or experience, that the Soviet threat to our security (and that of our allies) is best moderated by negotiating arms control agreements. It is a faith that flows easily from the premise, intoned as a conclusion by Paul Warnke, that the United States and the Soviet Union are merely "apes on a treadmill," with America providing the model of senseless weapons building that the hapless, blinkered Soviets have mechanically imitated. It is a view, ignorant of history and resistant to fact, that rules out even the suggestion that the Soviets

might plan their military forces independent of our plans or that they might pursue what they know to be a politically useful military superiority with which to coerce those states not already responsive to Soviet desires.

Committed to the notion that our relations with the Soviets are a mixture of "cooperation" as well as "competition," the Carter administration sees SALT II as the principal cooperative enterprise between us. The presumption seems to be that the mere act of concluding a treaty on strategic weapons, whatever its terms, is by itself an act of "cooperation" to be contrasted with such episodes of "competition" as the insertion of Mig 23s or a combat brigade in Cuba.

What is missing is any concept of what "cooperation" entails. Is any transaction between a buyer and seller an example of cooperation — or does it depend on the circumstances and the terms? Is a security treaty between the Soviet Union and Finland a sign that those two countries are cooperating — or is it simply an expression of Soviet strength and Finnish proximity?

In fact, SALT is really something quite different from the ordinary sense of cooperation. It is a bizarre symbiosis between our tendency to harbor illusions and the Russian practice of nurturing them.

In the case of the SALT II treaty, acquire fewer weapons with the treaty than without it. It is an illusion curiously immune to experience. That it persists despite the lesson of SALT I, following which the Soviet strategic buildup continued with undiminished fury, must amuse Henry Kissinger the historian even as it undoes Kissinger the diplomat. For after more than a month of Senate hearings on SALT II, it has become abundantly clear that our negotiators failed to obtain those constraints — on the Soviet capacity to attack our deterrent forces — that

would have given substance to the misty dream of "cooperation."

In some cases the Soviets simply told us to get lost — as when we suggested that 150 heavy missiles for them and 0 for us seemed fairer than the 308 to 0 the treaty ultimately provides. In other cases the Soviets held out for — and got — treaty language replete with loopholes and ambiguities calculated to permit their strategic weapons programs to go forward unperturbed. A prime example of this has to do with the deployment of "new" types of ICBMs. By the time the dust had settled over the negotiating table at Vienna, the term "new" had been defined so as to permit the Soviets to complete the very fifth generation of ICBMs that it had been our original purpose to halt. Finally, in still other cases, the Soviets were willing to trade cosmetic "assurances" for U.S. acquiescence — as when we gratefully received a Soviet statement of the range/payload of the Backfire bomber that our own intelligence estimates showed to be false.

All these points have been established in the Senate hearings. To Lloyd Cutler's self-serving assertion that the Senate critics of the treaty "failed to lay a glove on it," I commend the record of hearings before the Armed Services Committee wherein it becomes clear that the treaty has failed to lay a glove on the continuing Soviet strategic buildup.

As this has become increasingly clear, some senators have said that the treaty ought not to be ratified unless it is accompanied by an increase in defense spending large and sustained enough to begin to reverse the dangerously adverse trend that began a decade ago — as the first SALT negotiations got underway in Helsinki.

But beyond a fleeting tactical accommodation there is little hope that they will get their increase. For as the last 10 years have shown, SALT has served principally to ease the apprehensions of the West while the military forces of the Soviet Union widen their already considerable advantage. The impression of arms control without the reality, the atmosphere of detente without substance, the rhetoric of peace and stability as our defenses decline — all are fundamentally inconsistent with an adequate defense effort. The clash between that simple fact and the administration's faith in arms control cannot be reconciled. The Senate will have to choose; and the sooner the better.

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